DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 608 CS 216 236

AUTHOR Benander, Ruth E.; Roach, Timothy L.
TITLE Teaching Academic English Grammar in Its Own Context to Non-Native Users.
PUB DATE 1995-11-00
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (85th, San Diego, CA, November 16-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Writing; *English Instruction; English (Second Language); *Grammar; Higher Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Reader Response; *Second Language Learning; Writing Skills; *Writing Strategies
IDENTIFIERS Basic Writers; Communicative Approach; *Contextualized Instruction; Nonnative Speakers

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the similarities in the difficulties that developmental writers and non-native English speakers/writers bring to the classroom and how this can influence instructors' choices of pedagogical strategies. The paper proposes a method of teaching that encourages teacher comfort with basic writing such that student work remains the focus of the teaching strategy. In particular, the paper discusses how two such instructors (one who teaches basic writing and one who teaches English as a Second language), view the effectiveness of their particular teaching strategies. Using students' actual work as models when teaching grammar is suggested. It contends that grammar must be taught as a way to convey meaning, not as an isolated skill. Noting that the findings of research in second language acquisition can profitably influence the developmental writing classroom, the paper emphasizes that teaching grammar communicatively works, since students can show improvement in production and recognition skills. Linking reader response theory and grammar, the paper states that teachers need to "jump right in" and work with students' writing and still address grammar issues. Students can be provided with opportunities to actively use their grammar skills rather than passively responding to anonymous text and provides test comparisons to support this opinion. Contains primary trait scales for sentence structures and grammar, test score comparisons, and eight references. (CR)

Teaching Academic English Grammar in Its Own Context To Non-native Users.

Ruth E. Benander and Timothy L. Roach

Section 1: Introduction

Ruth and Tim are both English teachers at a small suburban two year college of a large urban research university. Here they see influences of community college culture as well as influences of university culture. Ruth teaches English to non-native speakers of English and Tim teaches English to native speakers of English who are not proficient users of Standard Academic English. Both of them find that they have similar issues and problems in teaching Standard Academic English grammar in their classes: the students come from radically different cultural backgrounds from the teacher, their daily communication is in a completely different system from the teacher, and they all need to learn Standard Academic English grammar to succeed in the college courses for which these teachers must prepare them. The experience of these two teachers is similar to many other teachers in the United States. We believe that these two populations can inform each other in the discussion of how to teach grammar.

The difficulties that developmental writers and non-native English writers bring to out classrooms influence our choice of pedagogical strategies. Some of us resort to exercises, workbooks, and the like. The exercises and workbooks are frequently written in a formal style that is foreign to developmental writing students and non-native speakers and is not useful in helping them find their own voices nor, in many cases, does it highlight the particular way these students misuse the structures of standard academic English. Formal exercises in identification and revision are indeed useful in learning the structures of Standard Academic English, but it is to the students' advantage to use material that addresses their situation and their voices.

In response to this situation, some teachers eschew rigor for encouragement. In fact, we should foster an atmosphere of charity and honesty that allows for rigor and encouragement to live together. Taking exercises from the writing of the students in the class highlights the structures they must learn which addresses the issue of rigor as well as personal voice. Exercises taken from the students' writing helps them develop that rigor within the context of their own writing which allows teachers to encourage students' development of their own voices.

In developmental writing classes, the students come to formal academic writing as non-native producers of this dialect of English just as non-native speakers of English come to formal English academic writing. Standard academic English has its unique norms of what constitutes clear expression, what is considered proof, what is reasonable assertions of opinions, and what is considered correct grammar. Students in developmental writing classes

and ESL writing classes in college are adult learners of this particular dialect of English and are new to the culture of American academia.

What we consider traditional students are those who have succeeded in learning this academic language early in their school careers and have successfully acculturated to the shared expectations of American academia. In contrast, students who place into developmental writing classes are new to this culture or have resisted acculturating during high school. Non-native speakers of English are in similar situations, and if they have been to college in their home countries, it was still a different academic culture. These students arrive with their own expectations of what constitutes communication and effective personal expression that may be shared with their teachers, but in most cases, is not a shared experience.

When we use grammar exercises and workbooks in college preparation writing classrooms, we meet our needs as teachers more than those of our students. The level of teacher comfort will be low because the experience of the students is so different from that of the teacher. Few teachers of developmental writing have ever been basic writing students. Only slightly more ESL teachers have mastered the same level of their second language as their college prep ESL students or been through the same intensity of cultural dislocation as their immigrant ESL students.

Teachers need to become anthropologists of a kind in that we need to observe and learn from the students in college preparatory classrooms who come from often radically different literacy backgrounds. In order for us to do our job as academic culture guides teaching Standard Academic English writing, we must become familiar with our students' language experiences.

We propose a method of teaching that encourages teacher comfort with basic writing such that student work remains the focus of the teaching strategy. As the students learn the formal structures and rhetoric of Standard Academic English, using student writing as the basis for the lessons teaches the teacher about the many voices and experiences that make up the world of our students. We wish to expose the students to new communities of interpretation and familiarize them with the nuances of code-switching while we address the traditional academic concerns of Standard Academic English rhetoric.

Teaching basic writers depends upon teacher acceptance of students' writing. How can we encourage that acceptance without sacrificing the students' desire to communicate? We suggest that preparatory college writing teachers use the writing of their own students on which to base the Standard English grammar exercises for the class. To put our suggestion in the context of the history of grammar instruction, we will review the literature of developmental education and rhetorical instruction as well as the literature of second language acquisition.

Section 2: A review of grammar instruction in the literature of developmental education and rhetorical instruction.

The literature suggests consistently since the Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer study of 1963 that grammar exercises undertaken outside the context of student writing have little or no transfer to student writing. Accordingly, graduate students in rhetoric and composition programs never use or even see such exercises. An outgrowth of this trend in recent years is total abstinence from teaching grammar at all, in the belief that fluency alone will bring about appropriate standard English grammar usage by student writers.

When graduates of rhetoric and composition programs begin working at institutions outside graduate school, they are often surprised that many of their colleagues teach grammar very rigorously, often using the sort of exercises so carefully eschewed in graduate school teaching instruction. At one institution in our experience, students are asked to complete a very difficult and intense program of grammar instruction. Tim often noticed that students would successfully complete a particular section of the program and then be wholly unable to see a connection between the concept just learned and the same idea as it applied to their own writing. When he asked his supervisor why students were required to do this program, he was told that students did the program because it worked. Tim's challenge then involved finding a concept of "it works" that fit the situation he saw in that place.

Tim found that both students and teachers felt successful when students completed sections of the grammar program, irrespective of any transfer to students' own writing. Moreover, at this particular institution and others, we both noticed that we, our colleagues, and our students often became discouraged when ardent labor on everyone's part seemed to produce scant improvement in standard English grammar usage by students. In response to these two pressures, we began to seek a means to teach grammar that would satisfy the needs of students and teachers to feel good about themselves and their progress while providing documentable progress in the use of standard English grammar by students in their own writing.

So, Ruth and Tim decided to teach grammar to classes and individuals, using student writing for models. Along the way, we decided to track the results of this teaching using primary trait scoring. Then we decided to look at students' performance over time on a standardized writing skills test as well, since we know that students are asked to take such tests in all sorts of placement and entrance situations. We hoped to demonstrate that grammar instruction based on student writing would produce positive changes in student writing. Further, we wondered if such instruction might produce statistically significant improvement in standardized writing skills tests. Now, having gotten some results. we hope to say to teachers that our efforts produce the results most of us want, even though it may not always seem that such is the case.

Section 3: A review of grammar instruction in the literature of second language education.

The findings of research in second language acquisition can profitably inform the developmental writing classroom. Horning (1987) suggests that standard academic English is a new language system for native speakers of different varieties of English, often radically different in cultural context and expectations for appropriate use from their home use of their variety of English. These students are, in effect, learning a new language with new structures and new norms of use. Thus, research in second language acquisition is informative not only to the ESL classroom, but to the developmental classroom also.

The role of formal instruction in second language acquisition is still being debated. Comparisons of naturalistic language learning and formal classroom learning indicate that formal instruction does not affect the route of language acquisition. It does not seem to matter what order the teacher chooses to present the structures of her lessons, the student will acquire the accurate use of structures according to a natural sequence of development. However, formal classroom instruction does seem to influence the rate and success of language acquisition. A student who is presented with language instruction will proceed through this natural sequence of development faster, and attain a higher level of accuracy than a learner who is not exposed to formal instruction (Ellis 1986). These findings imply that formal instruction is useful to our students, but that their personal language development will not be affected by the teacher's pedagogical agenda. The structures we choose for our writing students to practice in their exercises may not be the structures they are struggling with in their personal language development.

In addition, second language acquisition studies have found that explicit grammar instruction does have an effect on student production. For example, Fotos and Ellis (1991) found that students who received a formal grammar lesson on a particular structure retained that knowledge over time. Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that when the teacher pointed out the location of grammatical errors in compositions, the grammatical accuracy of students' revisions increased, but when grammatical errors were not indicated, the increase in accuracy was not as great. Celce-Murcia (1991) is careful to point out that there is no conclusive evidence that formal grammar instruction significantly improves a learners language production accuracy more than instruction that does not explicitly focus on form. However, she also states:

> Existing research, while not conclusive, strongly suggests that some focus on form may well be necessary for many learners to achieve accuracy as well as fluency in their acquisition of a second or foreign language (462).

Although there is support for grammar as a focus in the classroom, there is also agreement that grammar as an isolated topic is not useful. Grammar must be taught in the context of communication, not in the context of an abstract puzzle (Celce-Murcia and Hilles 1988:8).

A dominant paradigm in second language pedagogy is the communicative approach. The communicative approach to language learning and pedagogy maintains that language use must be taught in the context of a comprehending and creating meaning. In this paradigm, a

language structure is presented in the context of its use in interaction. The students practice the structure as they will need to use it in their daily use of the language. If students practice fill-in-the-blank exercises, they will do well in situations that require them to fill-in-blanks, such as language tests like Michigan or TOEFL. However, if we want our students to speak or write in ways that communicate meaning to other people, our presentation of language structures must include practice in these areas. Celce-Murcia elaborates,

> As a result of the communicative revolution in language teaching, it has become increasingly clear that grammar is a tool or resource to be used in the comprehension and creation of oral and written discourse rather than something to be learned as an end in itself. When learned as a decontextualized sentence-level system, grammar is not very useful to learners as they listen, read, speak, and write in their second or foreign language (466).

Thus, when we are looking for communicative contexts for our writing students, we can look to the area where we want them to produce accurate standard academic English and communicate content: their compositions. Student writing must be the basis for our grammar lessons in order for those lessons to have meaning for the students and to give them practice in precisely the context we are trying to affect.

Thus, second language acquisition research shows that formal grammar instruction can effect more accurate production of a structure. Secondly, second language acquisition research shows that formal instruction can affect the rate and success, but not the route, of language acquisition. Finally, this research suggests that for formal grammar instruction to be successful, it must be presented and practiced in a communicative context for the results of the instruction to affect productive language use.

These findings indicate that explicit grammar instruction is useful to our students. These findings also show that if we want to find the grammar points that are most useful to our students in our writing classes, we must look at their writing for guidance to see where they are in their language development. Therefore, in our search for a communicative context for our grammar lessons, we must look to the communicative context that is our focus: the composition. The writing students produce in our classroom guides us to what grammar instruction they need, and provides a context for practice that inextricable joins meaning and structure.

Section 4: Reader Response Theory and Grammar Teaching

We believe explicit grammar instruction is needed, and we know that it is empirically shown to transfer to student production in certain circumstances and not in others. However, in order to develop a method of effective grammar instruction, we must address the needs grammar instruction meets for both students and teachers.

Reader Response criticism: Stanly Fish says, in *Doing What Comes Naturally*, that we can never escape critical constrains on self-awareness. That means that we can never fully analyze the reasons that we do the things we do because all of the historical personal social

pressures that have acted on us all our lives act on us and they are still there. So when we say that we do grammar exercises in part for our own reasons, we can't say, "Don't do that anymore!" because we still have the needs that doing those exercises fulfilled.

We hypothesize that the interpretive communities of teachers do not coincide very closely with those of developmental students. We asked you to fill out a survey to suggest the degree of overlap between our experiences as English teachers and our developmental students.

We wonder if our own critical constraints as teachers might influence what we view as success in the classroom. We believe that seeing our students do well on a grammar exercise appears to be a measure of our success as a teacher. Moreover, when we do not see much progress in students' grammar use in their writing, we feel inadequate. It is possible that the grammar exercises help us feel effective rather than actually teaching the students grammar.

We need to jump right in and work with the students' writing and still address grammar issues. We hope that we suggest a way to achieve a measure of accurate Standard English grammar use,
while at the same time meeting students' and teachers' needs for tangible achievement.

Reader Response criticism further asserts that people form communities of interpretation and that those communities validate individual readings of texts. we assert that this dynamic coupled with what we said about the transfer of linguistic systems empowers students to assume ownership of the new linguistic system of Academic English when they work on it together in the communicative context of their own writing.
So, what we are working on is the development of activities that do this.

In Tim's class, he discusses the necessary basic elements of sentence, like the subject and the verb an how everything else depends on those things. Then, in the computer lab, he projects one student essay and the whole class would analyze it for the presence of the parts of the sentence structure the class is studying that day. The writer makes on screen changes and the class responds.

In Ruth's class, she assigns a piece of writing to be brought to class. She then discusses an aspect of grammar such as subject verb agreement, or fragments, from the students' handbook. After focusing on the form out of context, in groups, the students look at each other's writing assignments to identify and correct their usage.

In addition to these in-class activities, students in both Ruth and Tim's classes are required to do multiple revision of their formal essays. In these formal essays, both Tim and Ruth remind the student of the grammar structures reviewed in class and the student is required to revise the essay until it is in accurate formal academic English. A Student also

participates in conferences where the teacher discusses the particular aspects of formal academic English grammar on which she or he needs to concentrate.

We emphasize throughout that we are studying grammar in respect to its effect on meaning not just because it is correct, or not correct. Both in class and in conference, we seek to show students that grammar influences their meaning.

Section 5: The experiment

We decided to test our assumptions that this kind of contextualized grammar instruction really resulted changes in student writing. We wanted to see if teaching grammar in a communicative context would result in improved student performance in the task that we were teaching as well as in the fill-in-the blank tasks popular in standardized tests and other English classes.

We tested students on a standardized writing skills test (ASSET) as well as in in-class essay writing assignments.
At the beginning of our academic quarter (September) we administered the writing skills section of ASSET, a passive recognition test of grammar skills involving parallelism, wordiness, subject/verb agreement, sentence structure, and punctuation etc. Six weeks later we administered a second test of ASSET writing skills.

To test the students' productive skills, we collected an in-class piece of writing at the beginning of the course and an in-class piece of writing six weeks later. These pieces of writing were compared using primary trait scores. Primary trait scales comprise a series of scaled criteria, each criterium associated with a score. The following primary trait scales were used to evaluate the sentence structure and basic grammar of the student essays. These two aspects of formal academic English were explicitly taught in various lessons.

Primary Trait Scale for **Sentence Structure**
Ruth Benander, Marlene Miner and Tim Roach

5	No fragments, no runons, no commas splices. Frequent and appropriate use of coordination and subordination.
4	No fragments, occasional runons and commas splices. Occasional use of coordination and subordination though it may not be uniformly appropriate.
3	Occasional fragments, runons, and comma splices. Infrequent (but present) use of subordination and coordination. Usage of subordination and coordination is frequently inappropriate but meaning is not obscured.
2	Fragments, runons and comma splices are frequent. There is no subordination or the attempts result in fragments. There may be some coordination but use is frequently inappropriate though meaning is not obscured.
1	Fragments, runons and comma splices are frequent. There is no subordination and little coordination. Errors in sentence structure obscure meaning.

Primary Trait Scale for
Essential grammar: verbs, modifiers, pronouns
Ruth Benander, Marlene Miner, and Tim Roach

5	verb number matches subject number, verb tenses related logically to each other in time sequence, modifiers are in the appropriate case for the noun modified, pronouns have antecedents and are in the appropriate case for their position in the sentence. There are no errors.
4	verb number sometimes does not match subject number but lapses are rare and without pattern. Simple verb tenses are accurate but there may be errors in aspect. There are occasional errors in modifier forms but these are rare and without pattern. Pronouns have antecedents but may not always be in the appropriate case for their position in the sentence.
3	verb number frequently does not match subject number. errors show a consistent pattern of appearance. Simple verb tenses may be used in combinations that are not logical for the time order of the sentence. There are errors in use of aspect. There are systematic errors in modifier forms. Pronouns may lack antecedents and appear in cases inappropriate for their appearance in the sentence.
2	There are errors in verb tense and aspect that obscure meaning. Modifiers show systematic errors in form. Pronoun reference and case is unclear obscures meaning.
1	Meaning is frequently difficult to decipher due to confusing use of verbs, modifiers and pronouns. In places, it will be impossible to understand the meaning of the sentence.

We compared the change in scores on the ASSET test, and the scores of the two primary trait scales and found that there was significant change in all three categories.

Comparison of ASSET and In-class Writing
Pre and Post Test Scores

	Asset 1	Asset 2	Gram. 1	Gram. 2	Sent. 1	Sent. 1
Number of Students	26	25	25	25	25	25
Minimum Score	29	28	1	2	1	1
Maximum Score	39	45	5	5	5	5
Mean Score	33.3	35.9	2.96	3.7	2	3.3
Standard Deviation	2.87	4.03	1.07	0.75	1.18	1.08
Improvement in Scores	2.6		.74		1.3	
Probability	.006		.003		.01	

Although the sample is very small, these results suggest that teaching grammar in this communicative context may positively influence improvement in student passive recognition of grammar errors, as well as improved accuracy in student production of academic standard English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Basic Writers need grammar instruction. Teachers need to feel that they are helping students be successful, and students need to feel that they are getting "right answers". Formal grammar exercises works very well, according to these two criteria, but if we add the criterium that grammar instruction must help students produce more accurate writing, then grammar exercises are disqualified as a technique that works well. Grammar must be taught as a way to convey meaning, not as an isolated skill in order for the lesson to affect spontaneous student writing.

Teaching grammar communicatively works since students can show improvement in production skills and recognition skills. Communicative grammar teaching meets the needs of students by providing them with opportunities to actively use their grammar skills rather then passively responding to anonymous text. Communicative grammar teaching also meets the needs of teachers by providing them with an effective way to help their students progress. Finally, this kind of instruction also helps students spontaneously produce more accurate writing in their own texts.

REFERENCES

Braddock, Richard, Ricahrd Lloyed-Jones, and Lowell Schoer. *Research in Written Composition*. Champaign, IL: NCTE, 1963

Celce-Murcia, Marianne (1991). "Grammar Pedagogy in Second and foreign Language Teaching", *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(3):459-480.

Celce-Murcia, Marianne, and Sharon Hilles (1988). *Techniques and Resources in Teaching Grammar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (1986). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fathman, Ann, and Elizabeth Whalley (1990). "Teacher response to student writing: focus on form versus content", in Kroll, Barbara (ed.), *Second Language Writing: Research insights for the classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fish, Stanley. *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, rhetoric, and the practice of theory in literary and legal studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989.

Fotos, Sandra and Rod Ellis (1991). "Communicating About Grammar: A Task-based Approach", *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(4): 605-628.

Horning, Alice (1987). *Teaching Writing as a Second Language*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

CS216228

Would you like to put your paper in ERIC? Please send us a clean, dark copy!

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC®

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Paper presented at the NCTE Annual Convention (San Diego) "Teaching Academic English Grammar in Its Own Context to Non-Native Users."

Author(s): Benander, Ruth and Roach, Timothy

Corporate Source:

Publication Date: Nov. 16-21, 1995

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following options and sign the release below.

X ← **Sample sticker to be affixed to document**

Check here
Permitting microfiche (4" x 6" film), paper copy, electronic, and optical media reproduction.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Level 1

Sample sticker to be affixed to document → X

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Level 2

or here
Permitting reproduction in other than paper copy.

Sign Here, Please

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature: Ruth Benander	Position: Assisstant Professor
Printed Name: Ruth Benander	Organization: University of Cincinnati
Address: 9555 Plainfield Rd. Cincinnati, OH 45236	Telephone Number: (513)745-5778
	Date:

OVER

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information reguarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor: NA	
Address:	
Price Per Copy:	Quantity Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name and address of current copyright/reproduction rights holder:

Name:

Address: NA

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

Acquisitions

ERIC/REC
2805 E. Tenth Street
Smith Research Center, 150
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47408

If you are making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, you may return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

~~ERIC Facility~~
~~1301 Piccard Drive, Suite 300~~
~~Rockville, Maryland 20850-4305~~
~~Telephone: (301) 258-5500~~